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# TimeLines

Newsletter of the Concordia History Department

## It's an exciting time in History

Shannon McSheffrey, Chair

We usually save that expression to try to sell one of our courses, but right now it applies to our departmental life. I had the good fortune to become chair just as we moved into our new premises, just as four new faculty joined our ranks, and just as we learned that the "Life Stories" project, spearheaded by Steven High and involving seven other members of the department, was awarded a \$1.2 million dollar grant. Although former chairs Ronald Rudin and Graham Carr put in many hours of work to help make those things happen, I'm the one who benefits from the new chair's quarters – a large corner office with a great view!

I have realized lately just how much the department has changed when I had the opportunity to compare snapshot views of our department in 2001 and in 2007. More

than half of our faculty has been hired since that time: we have a young, vibrant, and accomplished professoriate. Our recently-hired colleagues have taken us in wonderful new directions, with innovative methodologies and inventive teaching strategies. Since the beginning of the millennium we have also seen our student numbers, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, grow substantially – undergraduate numbers are up by a third, and our graduate programs (especially at the doctoral level) are undergoing considerable expansion. In our new site on the tenth floor of the McConnell Library Building, we benefit from the buzz created by the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, by the Montreal Institute for Genocide Studies, and in general by students hanging around the computer lab and in the reading room. It's a great time to be in Concordia's History Department.



### Department of History 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Public History Lecture

**Title:** *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*

**Speaker:** Dr. Michael Rothberg, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Date:** Thursday, November 15, 2007

**Time:** 8:00 – 10:00 p.m.

**Location:** H-762, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W. (Hall Building)



# Introducing Our Newest Members

As is our tradition with the first issue of the year, we are pleased to introduce the newest faculty members in the History Department. Joining us this year are Erica Lehrer, our Holocaust expert and our candidate for the Canada Research Chair in Genocide Studies; Matthew Penney, our newest East Asia historian; Eric Reiter, our legal historian; and Anya Zilberstein, our specialist in Imperial History.

## Erica Lehrer

Tens of thousands of mostly American and Israeli Jews have traveled to Poland since the early 1990s in what is most often a one-time, pre-scripted and self-consciously negative ritual – a chance to see the Holocaust and the people on whose doorstep it took place. But a few Jews – like myself – have lingered or returned, drawn by an unanticipated (and even unsettling) cultural familiarity, or seeking new grounds for identity or reconciliation. Those who tarry often encounter Christian Poles on their own searches for their nation's lost Jewishness. This overlap of quests, of losses, of longings for a Polish-Jewish place are at the heart of the story I am trying to tell in my book-in-progress: *Remaking Memory: How Jews and Poles are Salvaging Jewish*



*Heritage in Poland* (and reconceiving national belonging along the way).

At Concordia I will continue to pursue my fascination with cultural practices and products that attempt to apprehend, represent, or come to terms with mass violence and its aftermath – from the stories told in theoretical and creative texts to films, monuments, exhibitions and the “happenings” of everyday life.

Trained as an anthropologist (Ph.D. Michigan 2005), my ethnographic work seeks to take both stories and popular culture seriously for the ways we use them to make the meanings by which we live. And since ethnography is itself a story-creating process, I see it as an opportunity to try to make better meanings, and convey these to diverse publics through a variety of creative means.

## History Department Again in the News

Dr. Mary Vipond was the subject of a recent feature article in the *Concordia Journal*. The piece outlined Mary's research on the history of radio in Canada in general, as well as her current project exploring the role of the CBC during the 1930s and World War II. The same issue contained a glowing report of a public lecture given by Professor Emeritus Geoffrey Adams, an article concerning the discovery of an 18<sup>th</sup> century manuscript

in the library that quoted Distinguished Professor Emeritus Robert Tittler, and a piece describing the recent visit of SSHRC President Dr. Chad Gaffield to Concordia. One of Dr. Gaffield's stops, as can be seen by the photograph accompanying the report, was our new digital oral history lab.

To check out these stories, see the *Concordia Journal* for October 11, 2007. (<http://cjournal.concordia.ca>)







## Newest Members cont'd.

### Matthew Penney

My interest in Japanese history began when I was a child. Samurai and ninja seemed like an exotic alternative to knights, castles and the Greek myths. As an undergraduate, I became very interested in world cinema, particularly Japanese films of the 1950s and 1960s. Doing undergraduate history courses while watching the works of Kurosawa Akira and Mizoguchi Kenji – two of Japan's master filmmakers – led me to begin considering works of popular culture as historical sources.



This inspired my doctoral research at the University of Auckland in which I show how Japanese popular culture has been used successfully to challenge official silences on war crimes and aggression. In my work, I have tried to draw upon a variety of popular media – films, popular non-fiction and historical writing, novels, comic books, video games – looking especially at the motives of authors and creators who represent the past.

"War memory" is a difficult, even painful topic in some ways. Rather than dwell on the violence of the

Upon receiving my BA from Memorial University in Newfoundland, I won a Japanese government scholarship to carry out research at Kanazawa University. In Japan, I started to seek out the untranslated films of some of my favourite directors. The war films that I saw contradicted the often simplistic or dismissive English-language commentary on Japanese war memory.

images that I often deal with, however, I find it better to think about how they reflect a climate of free speech and open critical discourse. In my future writing, I will continue to look at how important anti-war and anti-discrimination themes are communicated in popular constructions of Japan's history, moving from the wars of the 1930s and 1940s to the feudal and early modern periods.

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## History Department in the News cont'd.

Also in the news, the Department's programme in public history was highlighted in an article in the latest issue of *University Affairs* (November 2007) (<http://www.universityaffairs.ca/>). While describing the overall gains

of the public history field in Canada, the article noted that Concordia is home to both the country's only undergraduate degree programme in history and its first oral history centre.



# Newest Members cont'd.

## Eric Reiter

What a long strange trip it's been! My path here has been circuitous, maybe excessively so, bringing me from medieval history to law and back to history, along the way picking up three law degrees and membership in the Barreau du Québec. Though I wouldn't recommend this career trajectory to others, it has made me both a more engaged historian and a better legal scholar.

My doctoral studies in medieval European history at the University of Toronto gave me a sense of the importance of interdisciplinary studies and, through my work on the history of books and reading, of the role played by material artifacts in the transmission of culture. My decision in 1999 to leave history and study law at McGill was one of the hardest ones that I have ever made but, in the end, I don't regret a thing: in law I found a way to pursue fascinating questions, though with the bonus of being able to engage issues of present concern (something rather more difficult for a medievalist). And though practising law never really interested me, I spent a rewarding three years as a research lawyer at the Quebec Court of Appeal. My French improved dramatically and I saw the human dimension of law – real people engaged in human conflicts, not just abstract legal issues.

My main research interest now is in the development of the civil law of Quebec, considered comparatively and in the context of its European roots. I am



pursuing two projects at the moment. The first concerns the changing meaning of the key notion of personhood in law, and particularly the ever-shifting boundary between the categories of "persons" and "things". This involves tracing the change from a status-based, hierarchical view of society to one comprised of rights-bearing individuals, but also understanding (and critiquing) the gradual expansion of market discourse at the expense of personhood. The commodification of privacy and personal information is one example of this. The second project involves the

ways in which judges use history, and especially the tension between fact and narrative in aboriginal rights litigation. I am interested in the ways judges use historical "facts" to construct interpretive narratives which are themselves then turned into "facts" by the judicial process. This process serves to valorize a particular view of the past, one at odds with aboriginal conceptions of time, space, and history.

Here at Concordia I will be working with colleagues in History and other departments to create a program in law and society, a place where students can study the law not as a set of rules or techniques, but rather as a cultural force that shapes society. I am hoping this will become a true interdisciplinary program, building on History's strengths (such as in public history and genocide studies) as well as those of other departments to create something new and exciting.

To learn more about Eric, visit the Concordia Journal for October 11, 2007 (<http://www.concordiajournal.ca/>)







## Newest Members cont'd.

### Anya Zilberstein

My research interests have often involved pursuing something that puzzles me in my daily life – I see or hear about something suspicious and go looking for a historical explanation. One such project

was inspired by my experience of growing vegetables and flowers in rural New England, where fields and forests are typically strewn with remnants of stone walls. Local histories in one town asserted that the fences were built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for English colonists by Indians “who were paid with rum for their

labors.” In graduate school at MIT, when I looked further in the town archives I found evidence of a more complicated story: the demarcation of appropriated lands with stone walls was a very gradual process. The earliest boundaries were merely heaps of stones or unfinished rows; entire walls took considerable energy and labor reinvested every season (work sometimes done by Natives, but probably more often by poor white farmers). The myth of Indian stone masons came

from much more contemporary sources, especially real estate pamphlets from the 20<sup>th</sup> century that romanticized the walls as pastoral icons of colonial village life.



I began to see the stone walls (which I still admire), as apt metaphors of the relationship typical of most North Americans to their imperial history: one of quaint reflection on an undisputed and long settled conquest in the deep past. Why else would colonial mystique sell homes? But I also saw the walls as metaphors of history: the random scattering of

geological debris as contingency; the weight of the stones as the burdens of the past; the imagined ‘straight line’ of the wall as narrative structure; and the continual work necessary to maintain the walls as the constant refashioning that keeps history meaningful for new generations of historians and readers. As I start this new position in imperial history at Concordia, I look forward to helping students find the relevance of history for their own lives.

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## A Well-Deserved Promotion

We are delighted to announce that Dr. Frank Chalk was promoted to Professor on June 1, 2007. Frank joined the History Department of Sir George Williams University (one of the two founding institutions of Concordia) in 1964 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1970. Frank’s research has focused, since the late 1970s, on the history of genocide. A leading expert in this field, Frank is a founding co-director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights

Students (MIGS) and was named a Fellow of the Holocaust Research Center of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (2000-2001). His scholarship and activism have not only attracted countless graduate students, but have also made Concordia one of the leading centres for genocide research in North America.

Congratulations Frank!!



# A Department on the Move

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, members of the History Department embarked on a new and exciting chapter in our life when we moved upstairs to the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the McConnell Building.

The new home for the Department encompasses almost the entire floor, which was renovated to accommodate not only faculty and administrative offices but a state-of-the-art seminar room, an expanded student computer lab, a larger student reading room, space for Ph.D. students, and the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. The Centre itself houses a video interview room, a fully equipped video conference room, a smart room where professor and students will be able to interact through the fully integrated computers on each desk, a digital studio, an expanded computer lab allowing students to work on their oral history projects, and two editing labs. All of these facilities are helping the Department to maintain its position as a leader in the field of public history in North America.

Planning for this move took place over the last year and involved numerous meetings between Mary Vipond and me (representing the Department), Derek Parent (representing the Centre) and the architects, engineers, construction managers, and designers who were responsible for the renovation and construction. At times, it seemed as though the project would never get off the ground but the last few months, leading up to the moving date, saw a tremendous amount of demolition,

construction and renovation taking place on the floor. Finally, the plans that we had been studying for so long on paper, became reality.

The first phase of the move took place in early May, allowing the Centre to move into its new offices and labs, and to begin the long process of unpacking and setting up the computers and video equipment. The rest of the Department moved upstairs in mid-June after the final phase of renovation was completed. We then began the arduous task of unpacking and setting-up our offices in anticipation of the start of classes in September.

On September 10, we proudly showed off our new surroundings when we held our official grand opening. Guests included Dr. Louise Dandurand, Vice-President for Research and Graduate Studies (and a faculty member of our Department), Dr. David Graham, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, all the Associate Deans of the Faculty, Graham Carr, Justin Powlowski, Joanne Locke, Catherine Bolton, various members of the Concordia community and our many external friends and colleagues who joined with us to inaugurate our new home. It was a fitting culmination to a year of planning and upheaval.

So, feel free to come visit us. Our doors are always open and we would be proud to welcome you to our new digs!

- Donna Whittaker







# Department on the Move Photo Collage

*Below is a collage of photos, compiled by Derek Parent, which highlights our office construction. History Department Chair, Shannon McSheffrey and Dean of Arts and Science, David Graham are shown at the official opening of the Department.*





# The Life Stories CURA: Sharing Authority in Research

*"A good interview is a process in which two people work hard to understand the views and experience of one person: the interviewee."*

Henry Greenspan,

On Listening to Holocaust Survivors.

In the context of recent tragic events in Rwanda and Darfur, it is arguable that few topics stake a more compelling claim on humanities and social science research than the history of genocide, war and other human rights violations. Our project, ***Histoires de vie des Montréalais déplacés par la guerre, le génocide et autres violations aux droits de la personne***, will use the methodology of oral history to explore the experiences and social memories of Montreal residents displaced by mass violence, ranging from the Holocaust to war and atrocity crime in Rwanda, Cambodia, Latin America, Haiti, and South Asia. The proposal was envisioned over a two year period by a team of 40 researchers in the Montreal-area, including 18 community partners representing the city's diverse immigrant communities. Eight team members are from our department: Rachel Berger, Frank Chalk, Carolyn Fick, Steve High, Andy Ivaska, Nora Jaffary, Erica Lehrer, and Elena Razlogova. The \$1.2 million research project's administrative home is the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling in Concordia's Department of History. This is the first Community University Research Alliance (CURA) grant ever held by Concordia University.

Through the evidence of individual witness and community testimony, we intend to address three sets of questions. First, how is large scale violence experienced and remembered by its victims and perpetrators? What impact does mass violence and displacement have on

shaping migrants' social worlds in Montreal? Second, how do displaced persons tell their stories? How, when, where, and why are particular stories about mass violence told, and by whom? Third, how can narratives of violence and displacement most effectively be represented and communicated to wider publics in Montreal and elsewhere? How can these stories of trauma, survival and readjustment best be conveyed through photography installations, theatre performances, classroom teaching, online education, filmmaking and radio documentaries? To begin to answer these questions, we will study the narrative structure of life stories, their oral form and the meaning of the words themselves. Putting horrific memories to words is no easy matter; words sometimes do not come easily. Only by deep listening to the provisional, partial and subjective nature of these "recountings" can we begin to understand the meaning and memory of war, genocide and atrocity crime. Oral history has a pivotal role to play in educating ourselves and our communities about the social preconditions, experiences and long-term repercussions of crimes against humanity.

We believe the core research strategy and methodology of the Life Stories project is ideally suited to the CURA mandate because the idea of "shared authority" is intrinsic to the collaborative work of oral history. The nature of the interview - researcher's questions and narrator's responses - produces a unique source, the authority of which is derived from the academic training and professional distance of the university researcher and from the life experience and storytelling of the community narrator. Sharing authority, however, is about







## CURA cont'd.

much more than sharing training and knowledge; it requires the cultivation of trust, the development of collaborative relationships, and shared decision-making. It cannot be rushed. Communities are collaborators and true partners in dialogue as well as being subjects of the research. The project will devise strategies designed to share authority beyond the interview stage, enabling interviewees and community partners to help the project interpret interviews

and to participate in research production and creative expression. The most significant outcome will be to transform the production of life stories into cultural and historical materials for Montreal's immigrant communities - to preserve within these groups aspects of their history.

- Steven High

### Community Partnerships

The Life Stories team has developed eighteen community partnerships, seventeen of which are with Montreal-based organizations. Partners include:

**Page-Rwanda** ([www.page-rwanda.ca](http://www.page-rwanda.ca))

**Isangano** ([www.isangano.ca](http://www.isangano.ca))

**The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre** ([www.mhmc.ca](http://www.mhmc.ca))

**Communauté sépharade unifiée du Québec**

**Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Montreal** ([www.jias.org](http://www.jias.org))

**Cambodian Genocide Group** (<http://www.cambodiangenocide.org>)

**Communauté Angkorienne du Canada** ([www.cambodia.ca](http://www.cambodia.ca))

**Temple Bouddhiste Khmer de Montréal**

**Documentation Centre of Cambodia** ([www.dccam.org](http://www.dccam.org))

**Le Centre international de documentation et d'information haïtienne, caribéenne et afro canadienne (CIDIHCA)**

**Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education** ([www.equitas.org](http://www.equitas.org))

**RECIT/LEARNing Communities** (<http://www.learnquebec.ca>)

**National Film Board** (<http://citizen.nfb.ca/onf/info>)

**Canadian Council for Refugees** ([www.web.net/~ccr/](http://www.web.net/~ccr/))

**Teesri Duniya Theatre** ([www.teesriduniyatheatre.com](http://www.teesriduniyatheatre.com))

**Creative Alternatives** ([www.creative-alternatives.ca/ca](http://www.creative-alternatives.ca/ca))



# Department Members Secure a Number of New Grants

With spring came the news that members of the History Department had again done well in annual grant competitions. We are delighted to announce that four colleagues have had their research projects funded – one by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and three by the Fond québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC). Congratulations to the winners!

**Dr. Rachel Berger** received \$43,626 from FQRSC for her project entitled “From Ancient Remedy to Post-Colonial Cure: Ayurvedic Medicine, the Transition to Independence in India.” Rachel’s research will evaluate the incorporation of the indigenous medical systems into early state planning in Uttar Pradesh [North India] from 1948-1955 from a political and cultural standpoint, contrasting archival material with evidence drawn from popular, Hindi-language publications of the day.

**Dr. Andrew Ivaska** was awarded \$55,000 from SSHRC for his project “Black Diasporic Politics and Style in 1960s and 1970s Tanzania: A Transnational History.” In it, Andy will examine the key place of Tanzania in the political visions of a global black diaspora, on the one hand, and the complex engagements with African American culture and politics by the Tanzanian state and its multiple publics, on the other. Taking a transnational focus, the project tracks diasporic engagement with Tanzania from its shape in North American activist groups, through the activities of black expatriates, to a focus on its ambivalent reception in Tanzania in the midst of controversies generated by African American popular culture

**Dr. Wilson Jacob’s** “Islam and the Politics of Presence: ‘Preachers’ and ‘Gangsters’ in the Face of Empire, 1850-1940” will receive \$45,000 from FQRSC. The funds will allow Wilson to, in his own words, “launch a new research project that examines the histories of an unlikely pair of figures in modern Islamic history, the ‘preacher’ and the ‘gangster,’ as part of a broader intellectual program that seeks to access the history of political modernity from a new vantage point.”

And last but not least, **Dr. Elena Razlogova**, in addition to her previously announced SSHRC Image, Text, Sound & Technology grant in the amount of \$44,231, secured a \$44,840 grant from FQRSC for her project “The Culture of Surveillance in Cold War America.” In it, Elena will use a broad source base (including official FBI records, oral histories, letters, memoirs, and audience response to mass media representations of surveillance practices) to examine government surveillance in the U.S. as a window into American society’s moral imagination.







# Goodbye, Old Friend

Richard Diubaldo, 1940-2007

*On July 1, 2007 we lost a long-time member of the Department with the passing of Richard Diubaldo after a courageous battle with cancer.*

Rich Diubaldo began teaching Canadian history at Sir George Williams University in the fall of 1968. From the moment he joined the department, it was clear that he was a good teacher, an excellent scholar and a valuable colleague.

Rich joined a department that had been asked to mount a doctoral programme within a year. The need to increase hiring for the PhD programme caused a great deal of tension within the department. Throughout all the debates, Rich remained a calm voice of reason who judged candidates solely on their potential as teachers and scholars.

Rich published his excellent study, *Stefansson And The Canadian Arctic*, in 1978 to excellent reviews (except for the Stefansson family who felt he should have ignored the man's warts). In fact, the book was so respected that it went through a second printing. Rich also published a number of important articles; my favourite still is "Wrangling over Wrangle Island" which he wrote while working at the National Archives.

Rich also contributed to the University in many important ways. He was Director

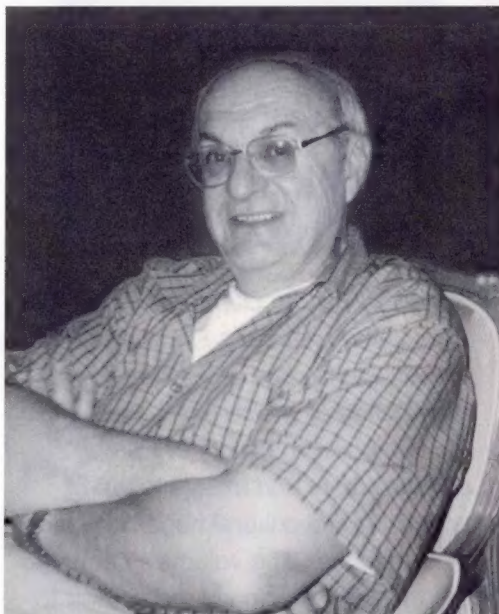
of the Centre for Mature Students and successfully shaped it into the key element of Concordia's accessibility for students from diverse educational backgrounds. Later he was appointed Director of Continuing Education, a programme which he turned around so that it soon provided a profit to the University.

As an administrator Rich exhibited all the talent and humanity that we had come to know in the History department. He never forgot his working class roots in Hamilton and always respected everyone until they proved that they were not worthy of his respect. Even while serving in his various administrative posts, Rich guided a number of graduate students to completion of MA and PhD degrees. I believe his greatest strength as a teacher

was at the one-on-one level of thesis guidance as evidenced by the respect and love his graduate students showed for him over the years.

One last note: it is indeed true that Rich had his office painted black and gold in honour of his beloved Ti-Cats. It is also true that the office was really, really ugly! So much so that the University soon changed its policy on acceptable colours for use within the institution. Rich, with his self-deprecating sense of humour, loved the whole situation. Those of us who knew Rich will always miss him.

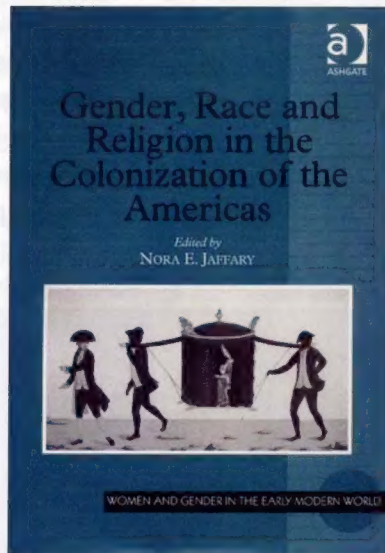
-Charles L. Bertrand  
Professor Emeritus of History





# A New Book to Announce: *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*

Editor: Alison Rowley  
Editorial Assistant:  
Donna Whittaker



Edited by History Department member Nora Jaffary, *Gender, Race, and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas* is a collection of twelve essays treating the comparative history of Europe's establishment and maintenance of economic and cultural hegemony over the Americas. The volume's strength lies in its illumination of the degree to

which local conditions in the New World shaped the face of colonization in different locales. It does so by exploring a series of fascinating case studies of women's relationship to imperialism manifested in such phenomena as the preponderance of female owners of African slaves in the Dutch Caribbean, the fate of women tavern owners in early Georgia, and the possibilities of indigenous and African women who wished to rise within the Catholic church. The book is organized around the themes of frontiers, religious institutions, race mixing, and networks. It concentrates on the history of Spanish America, but contrasts this history with that of English, French, Portuguese, and Dutch colonies. Nora Jaffary wrote the introduction to the volume and contributed a chapter that studies racial dynamics in eighteenth-century Mexico as manifest in unorthodox – frequently incestuous – marriage ties. The eminent historian of Spanish colonization, Patricia Seed, wrote the volume's provocative afterward.



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## Upcoming Department Colloquia

All talks will take place in LB-1014 (George Rudé Seminar Room)  
1400 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W. (McConnell Building)

**November 9, 12:00** – Clare Carroll, O'Brien Visiting Scholar in Irish Studies, Department Colloquium - "Italian Views of the English, Irish, and Scots in late 18th-century Rome."

**November 16, 10:00** – Michael Rothberg, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign - Seminar Presentation/Discussion - "Around 1961: Truth, Torture, Testimony."